



A LOOK AT DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD

*Case Study Analysis for the
Quality Practice Project*

The authors would like to thank the authorizing board members and staff, charter school operators, advocacy organizations, and other local actors who provided valuable data, feedback, and insight for this case study. We are also grateful to staff from Public Impact who were thought partners from the beginning of this project, led the data collection and analysis efforts on academic performance, participated in advisory panel meetings, participated in multi-day site visits with NACSA staff, and assisted in making sense of the findings. All content, errors, omissions, and conclusions are solely those of the report's authors.

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Please cite this report as:

Rausch, M. K., Conlan, S., Brooks-Uy, V. & Smith, N. (2018). *A Look at District of Columbia Public Charter School Board: Case Study Analysis for the Quality Practice Project*. Chicago, IL: National Association of Charter School Authorizers. Retrieved from <http://www.qualitycharters.org/research/quality-practice-project/>

ABOUT NACSA

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is working to double the number of students in great public charter schools by advancing policies and practices that promote quality, autonomy, and choice. As an independent voice for quality charter school authorizing, NACSA uses data and evidence to encourage smart charter school growth. NACSA works with authorizers and partners to create the gold standard for authorizing and build authorizers' capacity to make informed decisions. NACSA also provides research and information that help policymakers and advocates move past the rhetoric to make evidence-based policy decisions. More at www.qualitycharters.org.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About This Case Study	5
About The Authorizer	7
Organizational Capacity	9
Organizational Structure	9
Planning and Priority Setting	9
DC PCSB Board Engagement	9
Human Capital Identification and Development	10
Relationships with Entities Outside the Authorizing Office	12
Organizational Culture	15
Basic Values	15
How Values and Intentions are Communicated	15
View of Charters and Relationship to Schools	16
External vs. Internal Focus	16
Role of Leadership	16
Growth Mindset	17
Entrepreneurial vs. Compliance-driven Attitude	17
Process vs. Professional Judgment	17
Application Systems And Processes	19
Priorities for New Schools	19
Focus on Local School Development	19
Model Agnosticism	19
Charter Support Organizations and Innovation	19
The Application Process	20
DC PCSB Board and Staff	20
Resources Provided to Prospective Applicants	20
Norming Process	20

Written Application	20
Application Criteria/Standards for Approval	21
Application Review	21
Capacity Interview	22
Site Visits	22
Public Hearing	22
Defense Day	23
Professional Judgment and Application Decision Making	23
Pre-Board-Meeting Call and Modification Process	24
Board Meeting and Vote	24
Letter to Applicant	25
Access and Equity	25
Performance Management	26
Pre-Opening Systems and Practices	26
Performance Framework	26
Performance Accountability	28
Public Data as Performance Accountability	29
Interventions	30
Extension, Renewal, and Revocation	31
Replication and Growth	32

ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

The Quality Practice Project (QPP), an initiative of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), is designed to build a stronger evidence base linking authorizing practices and student outcomes. The purpose of the QPP is to test, broaden, and deepen our knowledge of how and why authorizers do their work and, above all, what authorizing perspectives and practices correlate with strong student and public interest outcomes. By studying the practices of authorizers with a range of performance profiles—with a focus on authorizers with very strong student and public interest outcomes—NACSA hopes to dramatically accelerate the adoption of practices that lead to stronger outcomes for students and communities.

Outcome-based Selection

This case study is one of five analyses of authorizers with strong student and public interest outcomes. It represents a description of authorizing perspectives and practices across a number of key domains. The District of Columbia Public Charter Schools Board (DC PCSB) was chosen to participate in the QPP and is the focus of this case study. It met a range of rigorous student and public interest outcomes. A complete description of the authorizer selection process, assessment methodology—including the measures and metrics used to assess performance—and case study process can be found [here](#).

In general, authorizers meeting those outcomes have:

- More academically high-performing schools (and associated students) than average-performing schools
- A small proportion of low-performing schools (and students in low-performing schools)
- Schools that are financially viable
- Student enrollment of key socio-demographic groups in the charter school portfolio that is similar or higher than a similarly situated group of schools
- No widespread instances of unethical behavior among schools in their portfolio
- Publicly-available data on the academic, financial, and operational performance of individual schools
- No instances of first-year closures

- Closed schools with egregious academic, operational, financial, or unlawful practices
- Closed schools in the bottom 5 percent of academic performance
- Schools with high academic performance that have expanded their enrollment or have replicated to serve more students

Case Study Generation Process

After the assessment of student and public interest outcomes and authorizer selection, a deep investigation of authorizer perspectives and practices ensued. Following the case study process as outlined by Yin (2015), researchers from NACSA and Public Impact engaged in a range of activities designed to provide a comprehensive description of the approach to authorizing, including:

- **Case Study Protocol:** Building from the domains used by NACSA to evaluate the practices of authorizers as well as the advice of an expert advisory group, researchers created a case study protocol and specific domains of inquiry. Key questions and domains of inquiry can be found [here](#).
- **Document and Artifact Review:** Researchers reviewed a range of documents and artifacts (see [here](#) for documents analyzed). This data was used both to describe authorizing practices and to more clearly focus individual interviews.
- **Interviews and Site Visits:** Researchers spent two days at each QPP site interviewing authorizers and other key stakeholders. The purpose of the site visits was to (a) get clarification on authorizing practices after examining documents and artifacts and (b) more clearly understand how and why authorizers engage in specific practices. Individual and small group interviews were conducted at each site. The majority of interviews were with authorizers (e.g., day-to-day decision makers, board members), but researchers also interviewed other key stakeholders (e.g., school operators, charter support organizations) to deepen and triangulate data analysis. The site visit for the DC PCSB was September 7–8, 2016.

- **Member Check:** Draft case studies were shared with authorizers and other key stakeholders at each site. Changes were made to the case study based on feedback received from stakeholders.

Purpose and Use of this Case Study

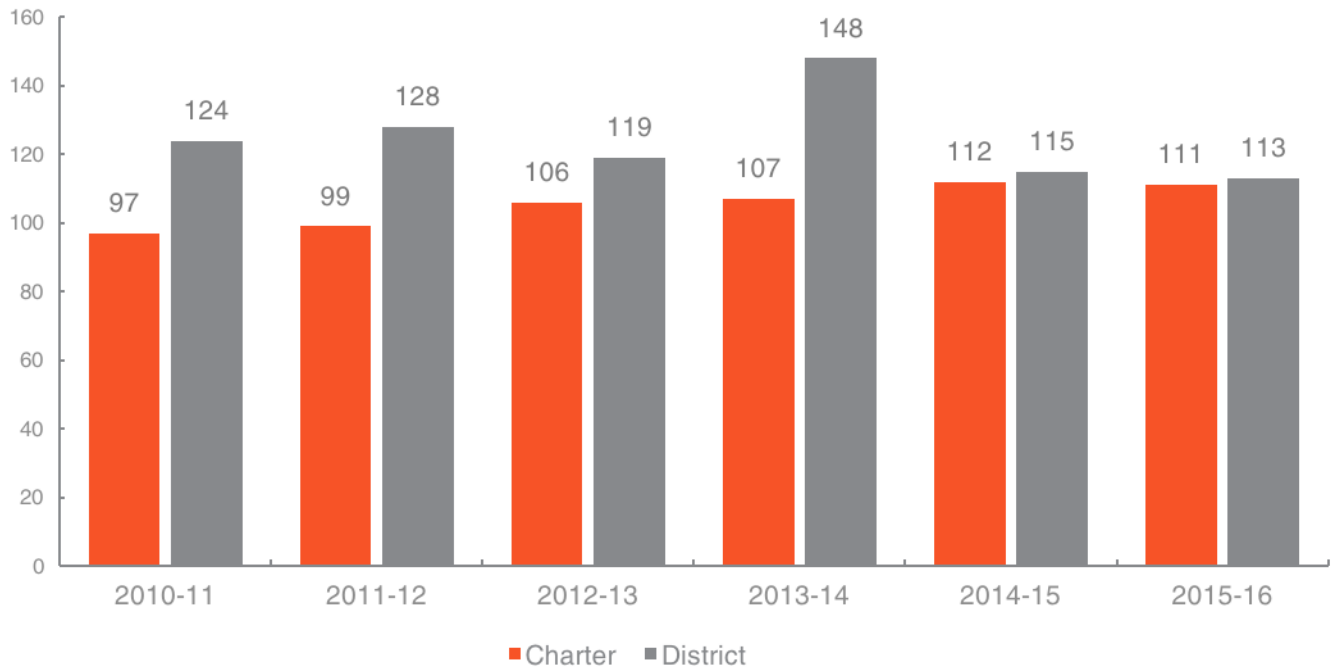
This is a case study of practices and perspectives of one authorizer that has a portfolio of schools achieving strong results, and caution should be used in making strong claims—good or bad—from it exclusively. Drawing causal inferences between authorizer practices and outcomes based solely on this case study are inappropriate; a high-performing sector of charter schools is inclusive of, not exclusively determined by, authorizer perspectives and practices. In addition, this case study is intentionally descriptive, not evaluative. It is not designed to evaluate authorizer practices against any standard of performance, and the case study does not comment on the degree to which an authorizer’s practices are “good” or “bad.” While this case study may be instructive to the field on its own, it is best used in conjunction with other case studies of authorizers with strong practices. We strongly encourage readers to also view NACSA’s summary of similarities and differences across QPP authorizers, found [here](#).

Descriptions of practices are current as of the development of this case study, typically 3-6 months after the site visit. Changes in authorizing philosophy, staff, and practices made after that time are not reflected in this case study.

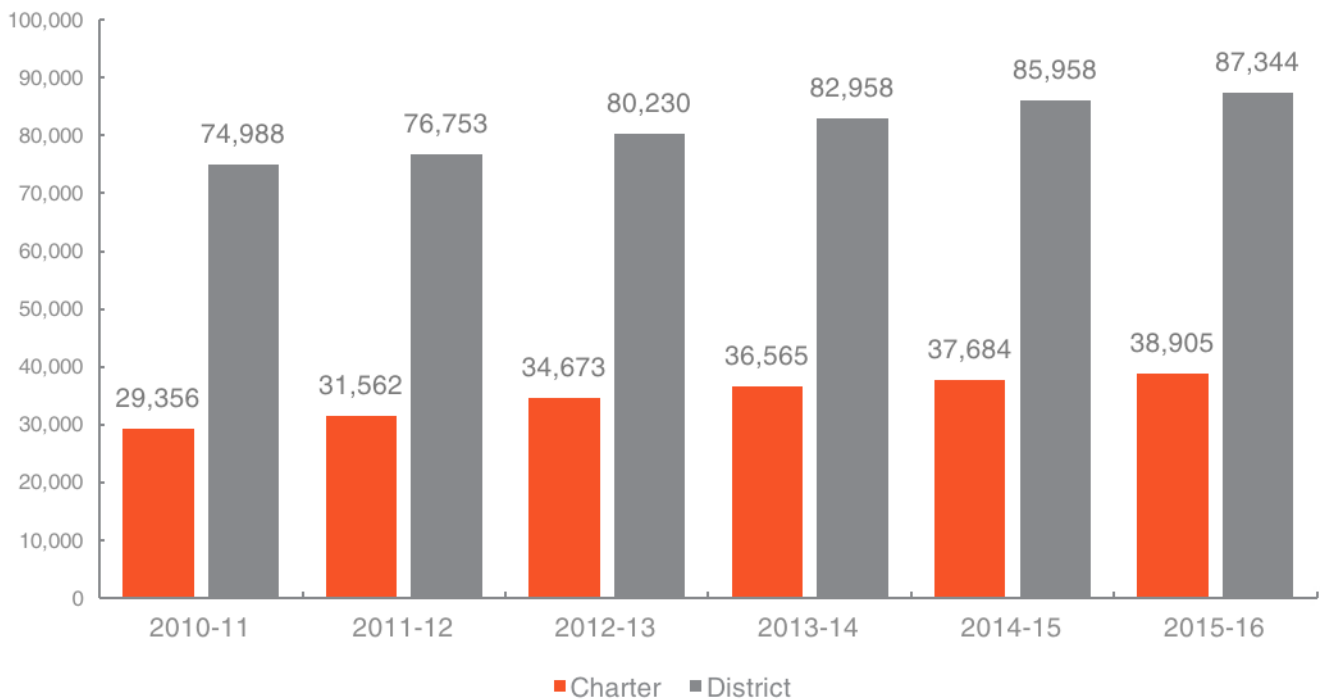
ABOUT THE AUTHORIZER

District of Columbia Public Charter School Board

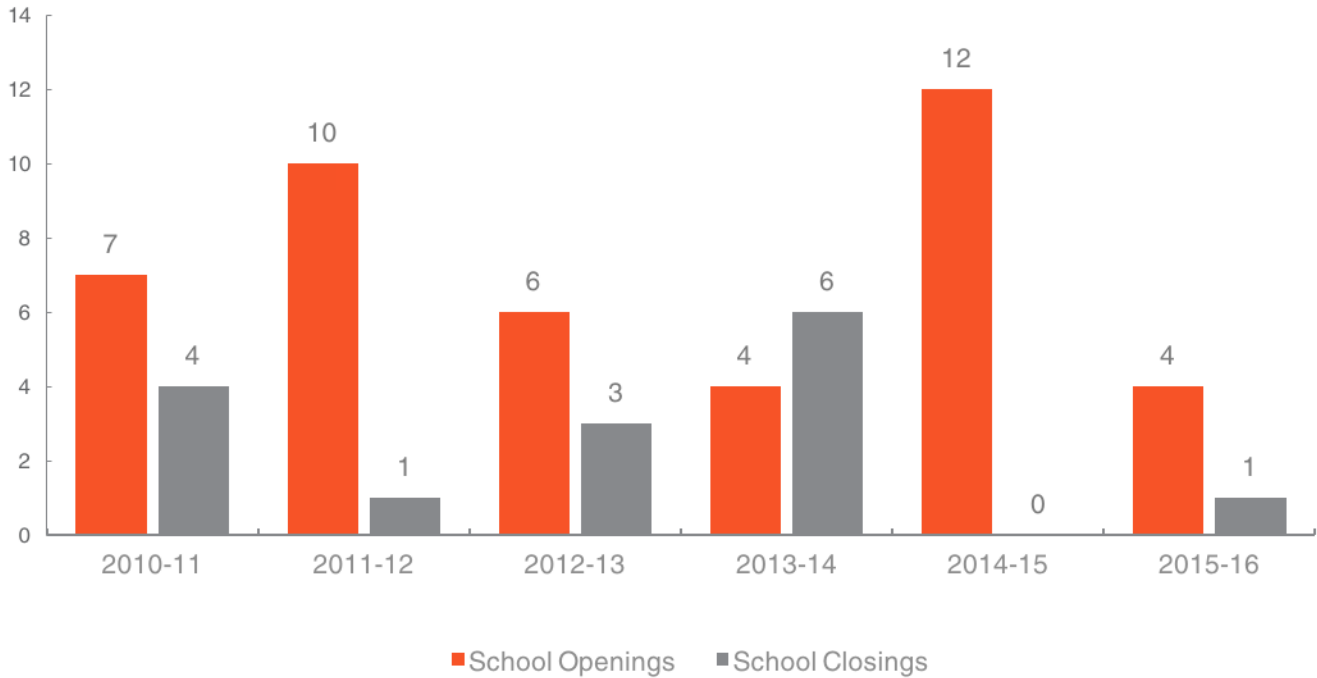
DC PCSB CHARTER AND DISTRICT SCHOOLS



DC PCSB CHARTER AND DISTRICT ENROLLMENT



DC PCSB OPENINGS AND CLOSINGS



Key Facts on Authorizing and Policy Context

- The District of Columbia (DC) charter legislation passed in 1996.
- The DC PCSB is the sole eligible authorizing entity in DC.
- State law provides for the creation of a charter agreement that includes school performance goals. State law does not require a Performance Framework.
- At five- and 10-year reviews, the DC PCSB “may” close a school for failure to meet goals outlined in its charter. At a 15-year review, the DC PCSB “shall” close a school for failure to meet its goals.
- State law does not provide for default closure for failure to meet minimum academic standards. In law, the sole authorizer is required to review a charter school at least every five years to determine if the charter should be revoked.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Organizational Structure

The District of Columbia Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) is an independent charter school authorizing agency and the sole authorizer of charter schools in the District of Columbia. The DC PCSB's governing body—the final decision-making entity for all charter authorizing issues—is a seven-member group of DC resident volunteers nominated by DC's Mayor with the advice and consent of the elected Council of DC. Unlike other authorizing types (e.g., school district or State Education Agency), authorizing charter schools is the only function of the DC PCSB. The DC PCSB has been authorizing for 20 years, with its first charter school opening in 1998. The DC PCSB's current Chairperson has been in that position for 1 year, but on the Board since 2008.

The DC PCSB is staffed by an Executive Director, Deputy Director, and a team of 34 additional staff members organized into five departments¹: (a) Legal (4 people); (b) Communications (5); (c) Finance, Operations, and Strategic Initiatives (8); and (d) School Performance (17). The School Performance Department is overseen by the organization's Deputy Director and is further sub-divided into three teams, each led by a senior manager: School Quality and Accountability (7 people); Finance, Analysis, and Strategy (3); and Equity and Fidelity (7).

Planning and Priority Setting

The DC PCSB's mission statement is to provide “quality public school options for DC students, families, and communities through:

- A comprehensive application review process
- Effective oversight
- Meaningful support
- Active engagement of its stakeholders

Such work is designed to (a) lead the transformation of public education in DC and (b) serve as a national role model for charter school authorizing and accountability.

¹ There is one additional staff person, the Intergovernmental Relations and School Support Manager, who does not appear to be housed in any department.

² The Board does not have an academic committee by design. All Board members participate in functions that may be done by an academic subcommittee. Board and staff pointed out that the lack of an academic committee is due to the immense importance all board members place on academic school quality. In essence, the academic committee is all Board members.

According to senior staff, since 2012 that work has focused on three areas:

Charter school quality. Staff noted it is, by far, the most important function of the office; all other roles and activities are subordinated to it.

Equity/Fidelity. Staff noted frequently that charter schools are public schools and need to live up to that ideal. A big focus of the Equity and Fidelity team is to ensure charter schools “act like public schools.”

Protecting and preserving charter school autonomy. Staff noted that a key differentiator of authorizing from traditional district school boards is the critical role for authorizers to advocate for and protect school autonomy legislatively and in authorizing practice.

The DC PCSB does not have nor operate from a conventional, multi-year strategic plan. Rather, staff participate in an annual process of goal setting. Each year, typically in May or June, staff participate in a full staff retreat. Each team examines progress on the prior year's goals, the degree to which those goals were met and the rationale for meeting or not meeting those goals. Progress and rationale are presented to the entire staff during the retreat with robust discussion ensuing. Senior leadership then shares any new, important priorities they believe the organization needs to tackle for the upcoming year. Staff noted that the “big buckets” of work typically don't change from year to year but the goals may. After staff discuss broad organizational goals, senior leadership takes such goals to the Governing Board for feedback and sign off. Finally, staff, especially managers and team leaders, create individual and team goals aligned with organizational goals.

DC PCSB Board Engagement

Multiple stakeholders noted the very active participation of the members of the DC PCSB Governing Board in decision-making processes, despite being volunteers. The Governing Board has four committees²: Executive,

Governance, Communication, and Finance. Each of those committees has one to four Board members. Those committees are designed to “get ahead of the curve” and work with staff on any key issues that arise. In addition to monthly breakfasts between the Board Chairperson and Executive Director, the Executive Committee meets bimonthly with the Executive Director. As described in more detail later in this case study, Board members are actively involved in every phase of the authorizing process, including attending application interviews, visiting existing operators, and attending and actively participating in public meetings/presentations. Stakeholders noted that while there is usually strong alignment between the staff and Board—and both entities go to extensive lengths to communicate often and effectively—the Board is the final decision maker on all high-stakes authorizing decisions and believes its expertise is valuable in conjunction with staff work and recommendations.

Human Capital Identification and Development

According to staff, the human capital identification and development system underwent a total revamp in 2012 with the hiring of a new Executive Director and a new Deputy Director. While this was driven in large part by the expertise both of those staff members brought with them from other governmental, business, and non-profit leadership experiences, the emphasis was threefold: first, to develop best-in-class recruiting, pay, promotion, and evaluation systems; second, to consciously create the culture of a mission-driven nonprofit within an independent government agency; and third, to marry a culture of high performance and high expectations with a family-friendly, flexible workplace.³

What follows are descriptions of how the DC PCSB identifies and develops talent.

TALENT IDENTIFICATION

Talent identification process. The DC PCSB has had a lot of experience in hiring new staff since 2012: all but three of its current 36 staff members have been hired since 2012. Human Resources staff use a four-step process for identifying new hires: (a) post the position description in local and national outlets (e.g., IDEAList,

LinkedIn), as well as accessing personal networks, such as alumni of Education Pioneers and Teach for America; (b) staff screen resumes and do an initial phone screening; (c) viable candidates are required to perform a skill assessment customized for the job and developed by the hiring manager and his/her team; and (d) the Hiring Manager and team (and others as needed) conduct interviews with top candidates. Staff noted that they prefer candidates with some school experience—and have seen better performance from such candidates. The Hiring Manager makes the final hiring decision in conjunction with the leadership team.

Onboarding. Typically managed by the DC PCSB’s Human Resources Manager and/or support staff, there is a comprehensive list of tasks that must be completed prior to the new staff person’s first day in the office. That includes things such as conversations with the new hire on the organization chart, mission, office norms, IT/knowledge management systems, email systems, office keys, and parking, among other elements. The goal, as noted by staff, is to make sure the new hire is ready to “hit the ground running on day one.” There is also a structured process the hiring manager uses on the staff member’s first day and throughout the first two weeks of the onboarding process, including (a) sending a welcome email to all staff with a bio of the new hire, (b) introducing the new hire to the full staff during a Monday all-staff meeting, (c) meeting with 10-15 key people across the DC PCSB and in the schools/community (as needed) within the new hire’s first two weeks, and (d) completing the Strengths Finder Assessment, with results provided to the Hiring Manager to build a plan for capitalizing on those strengths within the context of work responsibilities.

Flexible work environment. Staff noted that the flexible and “family-friendly” work environment of the DC PCSB is an important recruitment and retention tool. In exchange for exacting and high work expectations, staff are encouraged to work from home as needed, and the DC PCSB has a relaxed dress code for all staff, including the Executive Director.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Organizational talent development is a priority for the DC PCSB. A primary role of the DC PCSB’s Chief Operating Officer (COO) is individual and organizational talent

³ Staff expressed excitement about these changes.

development. In addition to and as part of managing the seven-person Finance, Operations, and Strategic Initiatives Department, the COO and staff are responsible for creating and managing staff development.

For individual staffers, each staff member has a standard professional growth plan that is managed online. Individual goals—aligned with team and organizational goals—form the content of those professional growth plans and are typically created in June of each year. Managers review progress toward those goals during a formal “step back review,” typically in January each year, and final evaluation during June or July. The final evaluation includes 360-degree feedback, incorporating information and data from a number of different sources, including the employee’s supervisor. The evaluation assesses not only goal completion but also workplace behaviors aligned with the organization’s core values. Bonuses are paid based on goal attainment, and salary increases are based on the employee’s summative rating on workplace behaviors. Extraordinary performance can also be recognized through an extra bonus. Strong performers are also eligible for promotions, assuming there are slots available.

For staff members who do not meet performance expectations, the DC PCSB’s philosophy and practice is one of providing substantial resources for improvement, coupled with making termination decisions quickly. The DC PCSB provides “whatever resources we think will help the person get better,” including external coaching, additional check-ins, among other examples. At the same time, staff made it clear that if progress isn’t made in short order, “we don’t wait” to terminate employment.

The DC PCSB offers organization-wide training and development through three to four trainings per year. Trainings include topics ranging from writing and presentation courses to trainings in trust building. The DC PCSB also prioritizes individual staff professional development. In addition to organization wide and other professional development the DC PCSB offers and/or pays for, each staff member receives a \$1,400 annual stipend to spend on professional development of his or her choosing.

The DC PCSB also focuses heavily on the development of its managers. A local organization, the Management

Center, supports nonprofit manager development for DC PCSB managers. New managers attend a two-day “boot camp,” while hires with prior management experience spend one day with the Management Center. In addition, managers have quarterly “roundtables,” where they discuss topical issues of interest and need to managers. A recent roundtable topic was handling promotion requests. The DC PCSB also places a premium on writing effectively and has supported staff with a locally developed writing seminar spanning how to write effective site visit reports to how to write effective emails.

The DC PCSB has a Staffing and Compensation Committee that makes decisions on new hires, promotions, bonuses, and salary adjustments based on recommendations from the employee’s supervisor. The Staffing and Compensation Committee consists of the Executive Director, Deputy Director, COO, and Human Resources Manager. For new hires, the Committee decides on the compensation band and target salary (the DC PCSB currently has six compensation bands based on existing roles in the organization benchmarked against national norms and DC district-run similarly situated staff members). The Committee has also developed a chart and set of procedures for promotion requests.

Management Structures. The DC PCSB utilizes a number of different management structures including:

Full staff meetings: These meetings occur every Monday morning at 10:30 a.m. The meetings are designed for the Executive Director to provide key updates to staff and to discuss important topics. The start time is also intentional and consistent with office culture: the start time is designed to provide flexibility for staff who choose later start times to navigate personal responsibilities (e.g. childcare drop off). Each meeting ends with “speed updates” and then “shout-outs.” Speed updates allow any staffer to share in less than 30 seconds updates of broad interest. These can range from news of an IT upgrade, to requests for help on upcoming school site visits, to an invitation to a happy hour. “Shout-outs” allow any staff member to recognize other members of the DC PCSB for any way that someone has gone the extra mile, done a great job, or been personally helpful or supportive in the past week. This is a very positive way to end each meeting and start each work week.⁴

⁴ The Executive Director shares shout-outs sparingly; the idea is that this is meant to be “staff-to-staff” rather than a vehicle for senior-level praise.

- **Leadership Team meetings:** These meetings occur every other week, typically last 120 minutes, consist of senior leadership and key managers, and are designed to address strategic and tactical operations and make mid-course corrections, as necessary. Generally, one hour includes key managers and other members of the senior leadership team.
- **Team meetings:** Each functional team meets weekly (and in some cases, every other week, depending on workflow) and are designed to align upcoming work for the week, as well as problem solve as needed.
- **Individual check-ins:** Supervisors and direct reports meet weekly or bi-weekly to discuss weekly activities, check on progress, and problem solve as needed.
- **Staff Tenure and Development.** As noted previously, all but three staff members are new to the DC PCSB since 2012. Two of those five staff members are the most senior leadership—the current Executive Director and Deputy Director—both of whom came to the DC PCSB in 2012 from other charter-related work in DC (the Deputy Director was the first hire of the Executive Director in 2012). The current Executive Director was formerly the head of the federal charter school program, and the Deputy Director worked for a DC charter advocacy organization since 2006. Both noted those experiences have served them well in that it enables them to draw on past DC-based experiences in re-making some parts of the work of the DC PCSB. The Executive Director was formerly a senior business executive and brought to the DC PCSB many of the management systems he had learned earlier in his career.

Relationships with Entities Outside the Authorizing Office

A number of entities in DC—including governmental, philanthropic, new school development, and school improvement organizations—have been instrumental to the strong positive outcomes observed among charter schools in DC. As noted by staff, those entities include advocacy organizations, such as FOCUS, Democrats for Education Reform (DFER), and the Association

of Chartered Public Schools; actively engaged philanthropies, such as EDForward DC (formerly the New Schools Venture Fund), the Walton Family Foundation, and CityBridge Education; charter real estate organizations, such as Building Hope and Turner-Agassiz; human capital organizations, such as Teach for America, Leading Educators, New Leaders for New Schools, and Charter Board Partners; academic support organizations, such as The Achievement Network, Reading Partners, and Literacy Lab; the DC Special Education Cooperative; and numerous college access providers and out-of-school time providers. While it is beyond the scope of this case study to describe in detail how each of these organizations (and others) has contributed to the strong sector in DC, it is important to note that the DC charter sector benefits from the presence and support of these and other organizations.

Some organizations and initiatives were noted as particularly important to DC’s authorizing function and quality charter schools. They are briefly described below.

Council of the District of Columbia (Council). The 13-member elected body (eight from individual wards and five at-large members) serves in an oversight function for many DC-based agencies and activities, including the DC PCSB. The DC PCSB must appear at two public hearings of the Council annually to assess the DC PCSB’s performance and review the organization’s budget. Staff are typically required to answer more than 100 questions and account for how the DC PCSB has spent its resources. According to staff, while the Council has broad oversight authority, the most contentious lever the Council can use is adopting legislation that can hinder schools, especially infringing on their autonomy (a fundamental principle of the work of the DC PCSB). Staff noted they are constantly vigilant and proactive in describing their work and that of the schools (see section below on the DC PCSB’s Communication Department infrastructure) to preempt or minimize the impact of new legislation.

Intergovernmental Relations and School Support Manager. The DC PCSB has a staff member (and others who support that staff member across the organization) whose sole responsibility is to serve as a liaison with schools and other governmental entities. Staff noted this function helps coordinate and facilitate relationships with a number of public entities, DC charter schools, and the DC PCSB, including the State Board, Office of

the State Superintendent of Education, Department of Health, Mayor’s Office, Police Department, and Child and Family Services, among others. Such relationships have proved useful for schools when problems arise specific to attendance, funding, special education compliance, transportation, staff training for administering medication to students, facility management, and others. Staff specifically mentioned the relationship with the Department of Health; over the course of three to four years, DC charter schools went from only a small number having school nurses to now more than 80 percent having school nurses.

DC also has more than 45 citywide task forces/ working groups involving the above agencies in which representatives from DC PCSB actively participate.

Communications Department and Infrastructure. The role of the five-person Communications Department with external actors was described as “profound” and a “big reason there has been relative peace” with charters in DC. In addition to having internal-focused communication goals and initiatives, stakeholders noted two critical external focusing initiatives:

- **Government and Media Relationships.** Stakeholders noted this work was focused on cultivating relationships and promoting transparency: actively explaining what the DC PCSB does and how it does its work. In addition, having a robust communications infrastructure allows the DC PCSB the ability to push back—quickly when necessary—on inaccurate news stories or to address emerging issues. In fact, with media and the Council, Communication staff try to prevent such stories/issues from happening in the first place by proactively reaching out and trying to cultivate relationships with key actors in those spaces. Such work allows for “fuller stories to be told” and makes it more difficult for local media and government officials to jump to inaccurate conclusions.
- **Schools.** As stated by one staff member, a key role the Communications Department plays is to “teach schools who need it how to talk about themselves.” Communication staff spend time helping schools thinking through things such as websites, social media, and community events. They also provide press release templates and social media graphics,

among other sources of voluntary support for schools as needed.

- **Community Relations.** The DC PCSB has a full-time staff member working with community members and local elected officials to ensure that their concerns are heard and reflected in the DC PCSB’s decisions.

Authorized Charter Schools. Consistent with part of its mission statement specific to actively engaging stakeholders, the DC PCSB views the charter schools it has authorized as key stakeholders that it engages regularly. The DC PCSB very actively facilitates the “school voice” in decision-making processes. Due in part from the perspectives brought by the Deputy Director from time spent working at a local education advocacy non-profit, substantial changes—and even small changes to some degree—are never made without considering the advice of impacted schools. The DC PCSB is known for having many taskforces on key topics, on which authorized charter schools are always meaningfully represented.

A second area where the DC PCSB has actively engaged schools in its portfolio is in its emerging work on charter re-starts. To date, the DC PCSB has engaged four re-starts (e.g., when a new charter operator takes over a failed charter school). The DC PCSB typically considers a re-start, compared to closing the school outright, when the school is not doing well academically but has a reasonably healthy balance sheet, has a board of directors that is willing to consider a re-start, when the school facility is owned or there is a long-term lease by the existing school, and there is a high-performing operator ready, willing, and capable to take the school over. While not originally an intentional part of the DC PCSB’s work (“It just kind of happened,” noted one stakeholder), re-starts appear to be an intentional part of future work of the DC PCSB. Key stakeholders noted that because the DC PCSB has already largely closed “lousy” schools, it is likely that they will begin considering closing “mediocre” schools soon. It may be more attractive, according to stakeholders, to consider re-starts in some instances for two reasons: (a) to the degree re-starts are effective, it may be a better option for the DC PCSB and local communities and (b) more operators considering re-starts may emerge, as “mediocre” schools may be more attractive.

A third area of active engagement with schools is via growth and replication. The DC PCSB's Executive Director actively encourages high-performing schools to grow. Those efforts appear to have had its intended impact: during the last four years, the DC PCSB has approved the expansion of 31 high-performing schools.

Advocacy. The DC PCSB is active in the DC education reform advocacy community. The DC PCSB annually develops and revises its own legislative and policy agenda. In addition, they participate in weekly calls with other local charter school and education reform advocates.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Basic Values

The values orientation of the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) is captured in its mission and vision statements (described previously) and in a statement of core values.

The DC PCSB mission statement is very direct and states key programmatic functions as priorities. The vision statement is expansive—notably, in seeking to serve as a “national role model” for authorizing. That might seem ambitious in other locales, but it recognizes the extraordinary visibility of DC’s charter community and sets the bar high for its own performance.

This is how the DC PCSB describes their core values:

- **Care:** We support each other professionally and personally; we value an environment of collegiality and fun.
- **Excellence:** We produce high-quality work to positively impact DC students and families.
- **Collaboration:** We value teamwork, welcome diverse perspectives, and build effective professional relationships with colleagues and stakeholders.
- **Initiative:** We focus on opportunities instead of problems, proactively creating innovative solutions and removing barriers to attain results.
- **Reflection:** We welcome feedback and engage in continual learning and improvement.
- **Integrity:** We promote the integrity of DC PCSB and the public charter sector through our ethical, transparent, and honest words and actions.

Under the leadership of its Executive Director and at the direction of the DC PCSB members, the DC PCSB staff strive to provide meaningful support to the schools in their portfolio. The office spends a good deal of time on stakeholder engagement. They have expanded their Communications Department in recent years, and staff are tasked with going to neighborhood meetings. As described by one staffer, “We have eyes on the street; we bring people in to ask for input. We try to be on the front end, not just the back end responding to complaints.”

Three areas of focus and organization, as described by team members, also amplify basic values.

1. **School Quality and Accountability:** This area of focus ensures quality in charter renewals, site visits, annual reports, and goals/goal attainment.
2. **Equity and Fidelity:** Board, leadership, and staff underscore the belief that DC PCSB schools are public schools first and foremost. This area of emphasis ensures that schools are open to all students and are compliant in areas such as discipline, attendance, truancy, special education, and English language acquisition.
3. **Finance:** This area of focus prioritizes school finances, enrollment, and applications.

The organization has experimented with other systems in the past. The previous system, in which a staff member was assigned to a group of schools for all oversight functions, made it difficult for a staff member to become an expert in one area: “Everyone was a jack-of-all-trades.” Staff indicated the current structure is fairer now in terms of workplace happiness, and it allows for more professional growth. Staff also noted that one potentially undesirable result of their new system is that schools have several points of contact. Staff have taken initial steps to try to address this issue by matching schools with staff liaisons. Some schools take advantage of it and develop close relationships, while others do not.

How Values and Intentions are Communicated

DC PCSB strives to strike a balance with its schools, simultaneously holding them to high standards and at the same time viewing itself in service to the schools. Some DC PCSB staff referred to authorizing as a “service industry,” with parents being the primary client and schools a secondary client. Interviewees emphasized that many of the DC PCSB’s staff members have been teachers or have run schools; they understand that the hardest work is done by teachers and leaders in the schools. Keeping parents and students in focus as the primary client helps the DC PCSB avoid “regulatory capture” and maintain its standards of school quality.

The DC PCSB believes deeply in strong oversight on matters within its purview, such as school quality, financial transparency, and service to students with disabilities. But it is equally committed to protecting and defending school autonomy. For this reason, it engages continually with schools and their representatives to understand how the DC PCSB actions or ideas might affect school leaders and ensure that the DC PCSB oversight remains in alignment with the charter school model.

The DC PCSB's core values are posted throughout the office for all staff to see. Additionally, there are photos of charter school students throughout the office that remind staff whom they serve.

The core value of excellence is reinforced through extensive conversations, internally and externally, about what excellence looks like. The DC PCSB sets demanding standards, both for its own staff and for what it expects of schools.

Collaboration is another serious commitment. Before staff make a decision, they get input from schools. They include the information in their weekly bulletin. There is an expectation that schools will be "at the table," providing their perspective when decisions are made.

View of Charters and Relationship to Schools

Even with the DC PCSB overseeing almost half of all public schools within the District of Columbia, staff have worked hard to develop and maintain meaningful relationships with its schools. Interviewers heard numerous descriptions of how the office relates to schools on a day-to-day basis.

In addition to cultivating such relationships, staff also monitor schools very closely and use the DC PCSB's rich data sets to calibrate oversight. They look for outliers on a monthly basis; as one staff member explained, "A school has just suspended five students. Why? It is amazing what phone calls and emails can do." Having direct and open relationships with its schools enables the DC PCSB to have frank conversations when questions arise.

Three of the 7 staff members on the School Quality and Accountability team focus their efforts on data collection and analysis, and this grounds decisions in real evidence. Site visits are a means to collect qualitative data, which

complements the quantitative data derived from the Performance Management Framework. Collecting the data is very labor intensive, but all data is validated. As a staffer explained, it goes back to the value of excellence: "If you want to be an authorizer that bases decisions on data, you have to believe in the data." But for staff and Board, "decisions are emotional and draining; being able to refer back to the data personally helps us to be brought back to a safer space."

External vs. Internal Focus

Though senior leadership are forward looking in their approach and run an operation with a strong internal culture, they also do their research. "There is always an expectation that you should be looking at where it has been done before," remarked one senior leader. They borrow from a wide range of other organizations when necessary and hire strong consultants when they can and if necessary.

Staff have collaborated with the State University of New York's Charter School Institute and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, among others, in the hunt for best practices. And when they were developing an Adult Education Performance Management Framework, they sought the help of an outside organization in DC to help them build something that was equitable for adults. The DC PCSB also has ongoing relationships with local and national organizations, including Friends of Choice in Urban Schools (a DC-based charter support organization); the DC Association of Public Chartered Schools; City Bridge Foundation; and EdForward DC.

In addition, senior leaders are in regular contact with peers around the country. The DC PCSB Executive Director chairs the NACSA Board of Directors, and the Deputy Director has a personal network of at least a dozen other authorizing leaders.

Role of Leadership

The DC PCSB has a strong leadership team, and one of its most important roles is working with Board members. "It is an understated piece of the work" of an Executive Team, noted a senior leader. The Executive Team, for example, will spend the weekend before a Board meeting talking to each Board member and discussing their concerns and their votes. According to staff, it is

time well spent: “When it feels disconnected, we want to reconnect.” Sometimes a formal process is needed: after one application cycle in which the Board wanted certain schools to open and staff did not, Board members agreed to work with each review team.

But it is unreasonable for Board members to read every charter application or the detailed background behind every authorizing decision, so the leadership team helps to prepare them while minimizing burden. At Board meetings, staff make the presentation to the community, and recommendations function as something of a “shock absorber” when adverse decisions must be communicated. The Board gets to hear the community clearly but is not drawn into playing defense.

Much of the DC PCSB’s workflow is built around producing and reviewing Board Books that go out every month and include all necessary documents, data, and evidence needed for effective Board decision making. Putting this book together is a tremendous amount of work that adheres to a rigorously followed monthly schedule. By the time it gets to the Board, the information contained in it is thorough. Materials in the Board Book are publicly available prior to the meeting. Board members receive the Board Book ten days in advance to give them ample time to review.

Finally, leadership takes an active role in visiting schools. The Executive Director has visited every school twice since 2012.

Growth Mindset

Interviewees indicated that DC is a growing jurisdiction. The DC PCSB doesn’t focus on increasing the percentage of students in charters. Its first focus is quality, whether that results in more schools or fewer schools. When considering the growth of a high-performing school, the degree to which there is a quality school for each student is considered. DC is still very far from this standard. The need for more quality seats, combined with the arrival in DC of 2,000 to 3,000 new students each year, has generally led the DC PCSB to approve growth or establishment of schools that meets the DC PCSB’s rigorous quality standards. However, as charter market share has approached 50 percent, recently the DC PCSB has hired a planner to look more systematically at

forecasted student growth and capacity by neighborhood. This person is working more and more closely with citywide planners to inform the DC PCSB’s work.

As noted, quality schools have opportunities to replicate and expand. Charter amendments (for replicating or expanding) are differentiated according to their status in the DC PCSB’s three-tier accountability system. For Tier 1 schools (those performing best), expansion is quite simple, as noted by a staff member: “If schools are Tier 1, it takes 30 minutes.” Tier 2 schools need a compelling argument for a successful replication/expansion and are generally denied for all but the smallest increases. Tier 3 schools, essentially, have “no chance.”

Entrepreneurial vs. Compliance-driven Attitude

The DC PCSB is entrepreneurial in many ways. Its mission is proactive, and it has developed several widely recognized initiatives, among them School Equity Reports. The reports describe how the district—both charter and district-run schools—is performing on a variety of measures of educational equity, including attendance, discipline, student movement, and academic growth. Equity Reports give schools, families, and communities transparent and comparable information related to equity across all DC schools and are available online so that information is easy to access.

The DC PCSB’s spirit of innovation is also evidenced by its Mystery Shopper Program, in which staff members play the role of parents of children with disabilities and ask schools for enrollment information. The DC PCSB website stresses that “this is not a ‘GOTCHA’ process—but an informative, value-add”—and cites evidence that schools have adopted changes in staffing and training to provide better and more equitable service once the results of DC PCSB calls are discussed with schools.

Process vs. Professional Judgment

Senior leadership is comfortable with looking at the totality of evidence and bringing their own professional judgment to bear on key decisions. Most of the staff, by contrast and in part by design, are more comfortable with strict rules and guidelines. This balances out well, with senior leadership free from focusing on process and staff able to

drill down on the substance they know best. Flexibility is built into decisions, allowing leadership some additional discretion in decision making.

But the DC PCSB has also built a strong procedural foundation. Its General Counsel has “forced” the process in some ways: “The difference between ‘may’ and ‘shall’ we take very literally.” Negotiating goals with schools constitutes a huge stream of work; some schools have adopted the DC PCSB’s Performance Framework, and others have created individual school goals.

Complex decisions are made through a combination of big-picture thinking and data. Staff always try to have enough information to make judgment calls and come to consensus on decisions. With charter applications, for example, review teams are asked to provide a recommendation. Staff then have “Defense Day” in which everyone “battles it out,” as described by one staff member. It is egalitarian at that point—everyone gets a chance to weigh in. Eventually, the Board is included in these pre-decision discussions, as well.

Importantly, use of professional judgment in decision making does not mean “winging it.” Staff’s ability to make sound decisions is honed through a great deal of work, including being knowledgeable about local and national trends and experiences. Staff present at several conferences throughout the year. The Director of Communications works to ensure staff have invitations to events to talk about what they do internally and to be part of a national conversation. Staff are involved in national webinars, especially regarding discipline, and work to be ahead of the pack in authorizing.

APPLICATION SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

Priorities for New Schools

Washington, DC is growing in population—both the district-run schools and public charter schools have seen enrollment growth during the past few years—but the District of Columbia Charter School Board (DC PCSB) is not focused on increasing the percentage of students in charter schools. Instead, their focus is on ensuring that there are quality schools for all students. The DC PCSB’s focus on quality schools, without an intentional growth strategy, is grounded in an organizational appreciation for the roles of both public school systems in the city (i.e., the DC PCSB and District of Columbia Public Schools). Indeed, the DC PCSB Executive Director published an opinion piece supporting the “rough balance” between charter and traditional district schools in Washington, DC.⁵

The DC PCSB identifies where in the city the greatest need is—and requires applicants to do the same. Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to research DC’s educational landscape. To support that effort, the DC PCSB annually publishes its *Background on Public Charter Schools in Washington, DC*. This document provides information about the availability and quality of seats in traditional public schools and public charter schools in DC, as well as information about need and demand for existing and additional public school options. The DC PCSB identifies the wards that have the highest need and has hired a full-time person to meet with the community. That said, once approved, a school must find a facility. Often, new schools are able to locate facilities only outside of the area the schools had originally proposed. Schools can locate wherever they find a facility given that DC’s relatively small geography and its free public transportation for students effectively makes all charter schools citywide accessible to all.

Focus on Local School Development

In the past, DC PCSB staff proactively recruited charter management organizations (CMOs) from out of state. As noted by stakeholders, DC can be a difficult educational landscape for CMOs to navigate. Its charter law requires that the majority of charter governing boards be populated by DC residents. Recruiting local founding groups can be a challenge for out-of-state or national CMOs. The

lack of school facilities and increased saturation of the charter school market has also made DC less attractive to many CMOs. DC Public Schools (the school district) is increasingly becoming more competitive organizationally (e.g., marked increase in teacher salaries), and their schools are improving academically, making it more difficult for new operators to recruit students. According to one stakeholder, “It isn’t like some places where you hang out a shingle and have kids at the door.” There was also a public perception that the Board was not interested in local operators, which the DC PCSB has said is not the case. Most charter growth has come from existing, locally run schools expanding or from new applications from local groups. As noted, the DC PCSB’s policies make it very easy for Tier 1 schools to expand.

Model Agnosticism

The DC PCSB is “model agnostic.” Their charter school portfolio reflects a diverse range of school program types, including college preparatory, dual language, language immersion, early childhood schools, expeditionary learning, Montessori, single sex, arts integration, career/technical, adult education, and others. More information about the program types of DC PCSB schools can be found in the *DC PCSB Annual Report*. The Board will not deny an application based on its proposed model. Each application is evaluated on its own merits, though some models may have a higher bar for approval based on extant research on model effectiveness.

Charter Support Organizations and Innovation

DC has strong resources supporting charter schools in the city. FOCUS, an education non-profit organization in DC, provides aspiring public charter school leaders with the tools and guidance necessary for creating successful charter school applications. NewSchools Venture Fund had a city fund supporting new schools, and now, Education Forward DC, an organization started by the NewSchools Venture Fund, provides funding and strategic support to help successful schools grow, expand, and start new schools where they are needed. Building

⁵ http://wapo.st/1C6QleW?tid=ss_mail&utm_term=.1d24c18c22d6

Hope, a facilities nonprofit organization, runs incubator facilities and temporary homes for schools. This strong charter support ecosystem helps new applicants and has contributed to the DC PCSB's ability to consider "hope over experience." When the staff considers a new application, they will approve with many conditions as opposed to denying. "These are inspiring, motivating people with a compelling vision that are filling a need. If you want to innovate, you have to take some chances."

The Application Process

The DC PCSB has a strong, multi-stage process for reviewing charter school applications, including a written application, a capacity interview, site visits for replicating operators, public hearings, and significant involvement by Board staff and Board members. DC PCSB runs two charter application review cycles every year: one in the fall and one in the spring. What follows is a description of the charter school application systems and processes of the DC PCSB.

DC PCSB BOARD AND STAFF

In the view of senior DC PCSB Board members and staff, there is a healthy, trusting relationship and important tension between Board and staff as they relate to the approval of new schools. Board members believe that they do not need to accept every staff application recommendation. Board members have information from the community and trust each other. DC PCSB staff believe that they will be more successful if Board members are confident in staff work. To that end, they spend a significant amount of effort on Board involvement and communication in the charter application process. The Board conducts hearings with applicants and are the ultimate application decision makers. Board members read all charter applications and staff memos and may informally take the lead (among the Board) on one to two applications depending on the number of applications. The lead Board reviewer typically visits the school (if the applicant operates a school/program), drives questioning during the public hearing, and ensures the other Board members are up-to-speed on the applicant. Because Board members are involved throughout the application process, questions and concerns from Board members are identified and answered early in the process. Board involvement in the process also ensures staff-Board alignment.

RESOURCES PROVIDED TO PROSPECTIVE APPLICANTS

The DC PCSB provides a variety of resources to prospective applicants on its website, including charter application timelines, materials, detailed application guidelines, informational videos, compiled questions and answers from previous applicants, previously approved and denied applications, along with communications to previous applicants. The DC PCSB actively encourages prospective applicants to meet with DC PCSB staff to discuss the application process and expectations and the applicant's plans and questions. Staff are available to meet with prospective applicants "early and often" in the process. They want to hear about any prospective applications and often suggest previously accepted similar applications and applicants to examine or talk to. The DC PCSB revises applications guidelines each year based on feedback from recently approved applicants, charter support organizations, and internal staff involved in the application process.

NORMING PROCESS

The DC PCSB conducts an annual norming process for new application reviewers. New staff shadow more experienced reviewers and participate in review teams to familiarize themselves with the standards for application approval. This process helps standardize the DC PCSB's approach to application review, both within and across review teams. It also increases the alignment of staff recommendations to the Board.

WRITTEN APPLICATION

The DC PCSB has two application deadlines separated by a few days: an electronic deadline and a full-application deadline. Applicants must first submit their application electronically. Upon receipt of the electronic application, staff review each application for completeness. Applicants receive confirmation that their application is or is not complete. When applications are incomplete, staff specify the missing elements, and applicants can submit those missing elements prior to the full-application deadline. By the full-application deadline, applicants must submit printed copies of the application, a Microsoft Word version of the application, a PDF version of the application with founding member contact information, and paper copies of board member agreements with original signatures.

The written application is divided into seven broad sections, not including required appendices: establishing the need for the school, the educational plan, the management plan, the finance plan, information about the founding group, additional documents related to incorporation and governance, and a curriculum sample. The application differentiates between three applicant types: experienced operators (charter network outside of DC), management organizations (if a local group decides to contract with a management organization), and new schools. Individual questions within each section may differ depending on applicant type.⁶

APPLICATION CRITERIA/STANDARDS FOR APPROVAL

Each section of DC PCSB's charter application has a *Standard for Approval*. Those Standards are described in detail and available to all applicants in the Board's *Charter Application Guidelines*. In addition to the specific standards of approval for each section, the DC PCSB evaluates the entire charter application based on five overall Standards of Approval: demonstrated need, sufficient progress in developing the plan, consistency of mission and philosophy, inclusiveness, and founding group ability.

To demonstrate need for the school, an applicant must make a case both that the school fits an unmet need in Washington, DC, and that there is demand for that need. To meet this criterion, applicants must demonstrate that they understand the community they propose to serve and what the school is going to provide to that community.

To demonstrate sufficient progress in developing the plan, the applicant must realistically assess the challenges they will face in opening and operating the school, clearly describing how they will address the challenges. This includes a description of how the school's academic and non-academic programming will fulfill its goals and mission. If elements of the school are not yet fully developed, applicants must outline an achievable timeline. Applicants must also describe their plans for growth after opening. The driving question for this criterion is "has the applicant progressed far enough during the application process that they will be able to meet their school opening

targets and open in the 16 months between approval and school opening?"

To demonstrate consistency of mission and philosophy, the mission, philosophy, and school program must be consistent and evident throughout the charter application. Each school planning decision described in the application must reflect the mission, philosophy, and school program. For example, if an applicant is proposing to open a charter school for new or pregnant teenage mothers, reviewers would expect to see the necessary community supports described in the application (e.g., having daycare at the school or located nearby).

The DC PCSB explicitly includes inclusiveness as a key criterion in evaluating charter applications. To meet this criterion, each element of the charter application must be deliberately designed to be inclusive of all students, including students with disabilities, English Learners, students who are academically struggling or advanced, homeless students, and any other populations specifically targeted as part of the school's proposed mission.

The criterion for demonstrating founding group ability differs across applicant type. All founding groups, regardless of type, must demonstrate that they understand the DC educational landscape and how to attract students and families; must hold a strong commitment to all students, including having a member of the founding group with special education expertise; have effective financial and legal controls; and have founding members or an operational team to build and implement the proposed program. New school applicants must also demonstrate that they have the experience, knowledge, and skill to implement research-proven strategies to produce results with student populations like those found in DC public schools. Experienced operators and those schools planning to contract with a management organization must have a history of results with student populations like those found in DC public schools.

APPLICATION REVIEW

The DC PCSB does not generally rely on external reviewers to review charter applications.⁷ Instead, the DC PCSB uses internal expertise to make application evaluation judgments. In their view, if they don't have the expertise to evaluate an application, they need to bring

⁷ Applications for certain specialized schools will lead to the DC PCSB adding a subject matter expert to the review team.

in additional expertise or change something about their office. Describing their view, one interviewee stated, “I’m not authorizing a school that I don’t understand how to oversee.” This policy is a shift from the previous Executive Director who brought in outside experts to score applications using an established rubric, and staff managed the scoring.

Staff review teams are assembled to evaluate each application submitted. Teams are composed of a lead, two generalist reviewers, a special education specialist, and a financial specialist. In addition, each application has a Board member assigned to it. The DC PCSB Executive Director and Deputy Director read entire applications in their entirety. Members of the legal and communication departments read application sections. The communication department pays close attention to the school’s community engagement plans, checking to ensure that the applicant has done a sufficient job engaging constituents for a successful opening. The legal department pays close attention to the governance structure, especially if a charter management organization is involved. The team lead reviews the application and manages the day-to-day progress of the application review process. Each reviewer evaluates the applicant using a standardized evaluation and scoring form. The DC PCSB’s evaluation and scoring form provides reviewers detailed information regarding what to look for in each section of the application. The DC PCSB does not rely on an overall application scoring system. Reviewers rate each section of the application as Meets or Does not meet, noting the strengths and weaknesses that led to the rating and any essential questions that must be answered at the capacity interview.

CAPACITY INTERVIEW

The capacity interview is an essential component of the DC PCSB’s application evaluation process. The interview is a question-and-answer discussion between the DC PCSB staff and Board, and the founding group of the proposed school. The questions asked at the interview are developed by the application review team. Questions are intended to gather more information about weak aspects of the application or gain clarification on areas of the application that the review team doesn’t understand. The capacity interview is also a key tool in evaluating the capacity of the founding team to execute the plan described in the written application. Application reviewers

pay attention to how the applicant “speaks to the written document.” Do they have the right people at the interview? Have they been unable to recruit key positions in time for the interview? Reviewers also pay attention to who is answering each question. Is it just one person? Only the school leader?

Review team members divide the questions among themselves. Applicants are invited to bring as many members of the founding group as they wish. DC PCSB recommends that applicant groups bring five members, including their special education expert, to the capacity interview. The DC PCSB application review team, staff dedicated to the application process, the DC PCSB Executive Director, and the Deputy Director all attend the capacity interview. Typically, the Board member assigned the application also attends the interview, with other Board members occasionally choosing to attend, as well. Additional staff may attend and listen. Capacity interviews are recorded, and transcripts are produced and made public along with the rest of the Board meeting materials.

SITE VISITS

If an applicant is an existing operator, DC PCSB staff and Board members will visit the founding group’s existing school(s). All experienced operators undergo site visits. Many start-ups also undergo site visits if, for example, they are replicating a program but don’t have three years of accountability data or are running other schools but not replicating those in DC. Site visits (if applicable) occur soon after the capacity interviews are completed. Site visits are aligned with the standards of approval applied to the written application. Site visits do not involve extensive interviews with school leaders and staff. Site visitors look for evidence that the design elements proposed for the new school are occurring in the existing school and assess overall impressions of quality and equity.

PUBLIC HEARING

The public is encouraged to present testimony related to new charter applications in writing or in person at a public hearing. Public hearings provide an opportunity for the Board to ask questions of applicants and to hear public testimony regarding the applications. Hearings are typically scheduled several weeks after the capacity interviews (and 3-4 weeks before the Board makes decisions on applications). All applicants for a given application cycle attend the same hearing. The length

of the meetings differs depending on the number of applications and the amount of public comment. Hearings are typically held near the DC PCSB's offices at a school with a large auditorium to accommodate the public. Hearings are not held in the neighborhood proposed by the applicant for the school, as most applications are very broad about possible locations due to facilities uncertainty. DC PCSB staff introduce each applicant. Then, the applicant may address the Board and the public with prepared comments for no longer than five minutes. At the hearing, Board members question each applicant for approximately 30 minutes, and the public has an opportunity to give testimony for or against the application. Prior to the hearing, Board members in attendance will typically read the transcripts from the capacity interview. DC PCSB staff will suggest questions for the Board to ask applicants. Often Board members will ask applicants questions answered poorly in the capacity interview, questions that were not answered during the capacity interview, or original questions of interest to Board members. The format is similar to the capacity interview, but the applicant is now in public. The DC PCSB posts and archives hearing materials and video recordings online.

DEFENSE DAY

After the review of the written application, capacity interview, site visit (if applicable), and public hearing, the review team comes to consensus regarding a recommendation for approval. Once a recommendation has been reached by the review team, a "defense day" is scheduled. Review team members, senior staff, any other staff that have read the application, and Board members are invited to participate. The application team lead presents the recommendation, and everyone in attendance debates and questions the recommendation. The evaluation of the application is about both the school plan and founding team. According to senior staff, this unique approach to application evaluation is modeled on the processes many venture capital firms use to evaluate investment opportunities. Everyone in attendance is welcome to contribute to the discussion. Participants describe the philosophy behind this approach as a "culture of critical engagement. No one's voice is more valuable because of their position." Said one participant, "Using our own people, using judgment, we have this day where everyone comes together, and we debate." This strategy increases inter-rater reliability, assuring that everyone is

in consensus regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the application and that the same standard of review is applied to each applicant. It also fosters the feeling that every staff member has a stake in what the Board does and prepares the recommendation for presentation to the Board.

Professional Judgment and Application Decision Making

The DC PCSB's application process relies heavily on the professional judgment and expertise of its staff. Diverse staff perspectives balance one another and contribute to the success of their charter application process. Many staff members are focused on strong application practice and "following the rules." This perspective is balanced by senior staff who are more comfortable with looking at the totality of the evidence and have a belief that a strong team can better implement a weaker plan than the reverse. This balance is intentional: "We [senior staff] put more focus on the belief of the team and the belief in the applicant, and other staff focus more on the plan." Senior staff intentionally try not to be process oriented. They have compensated for that by having other staff focus intently on process.

This balance is reflected in application decision making. The Executive Director and Deputy Director read every application but are not part of review teams. Application recommendations are reached by consensus and limited to the staff members who have participated in the application process. While consensus is usually reached, there is often a spectrum of opinions, with some staff supporting the application, some staff wavering, and some staff against the application. When a reviewer has a strong concern, the team discusses how to address that concern. Should addressing the concern be included as a condition for approval or should it be cited as a reason for denial? The review team, Executive Director, and Deputy Director make the recommendation. Because the Board is involved throughout the application process, staff usually has information about how the Board is leaning. That information can influence the staff recommendation. If the Board is leaning toward approving an application, staff members consider how they can reach a recommendation while addressing any concerns with the application. If there are significant staff concerns but the Board is likely

to approve an application, staff may recommend for approval with an extensive list of conditions.

The DC PCSB reviews each application in its entirety to ensure that the standards in each section are met and to ensure that the founding group has the capacity to implement the plan. Full approval or conditional approval is granted only if the majority of standards are met, with particular weight placed on the educational plan. The DC PCSB may grant conditional approval if there are some elements of the application that still need improvement, provided that the founding group has demonstrated that it has the capacity to improve its plan during the planning year. Applications lacking in any of the criteria areas are denied charter approval but permitted to reapply in a future application cycle at least 12 months after the current cycle.

Staff Recommendation Letter. The application team lead is responsible for much of the communication with the Board, particularly writing the staff memos shared with the Board before the public hearing and the vote, and answering any questions Board members may have about the applicant. Staff communicate their recommendations to the Board via a Recommendation Memo. Writing the staff Recommendation Memo is a deliberative process. Every Board Memo goes through multiple reviews by multiple staff members. During the writing process, the letter can change significantly, including conditions being added to a recommendation or removed. The final letter makes a clear recommendation regarding approval, provides background information about the applicant group and proposed school, includes a summary analysis describing the evaluation of each area of the application against the Standard for Approval, describes the resolution of any shortcomings identified in earlier applications submitted, and recommends any conditions to fully approve the charter. The Board does not review recommendations for denial. Those decisions are made and communicated at the staff level. Denied applicants may reapply in a future application cycle but not in the same 12-month period.

Pre-Board-Meeting Communication. Ten days before any Board meeting, the Board receives materials relevant to any Board decision making, including application recommendations and supporting materials. As previously noted, this collection of documents is called the Board Book. The Board Book is designed so that staff

recommendations are clear, easy to read, and supported by data. Interviews suggested that staff members may be giving the Board “too much” information, but they want the Board to have access to as much information as desired. Staff workflow is built around Board Books that are distributed to the Board every month. Board members typically read the Books, read the summaries, talk to staff, or some combination of the three.

Pre-board-meeting Call and Modification Process

One week before any Board meeting, senior staff discuss the draft recommendations with individual Board members to ask if they have any questions or changes related to the Board Book. During that process, Board members can ask staff about recommendations and suggest changes, and following these discussions, staff makes requested changes. Notably, recommendations have changed because of Board input at this stage. Soliciting and accepting Board feedback before presenting recommendations at the Board meeting builds credibility with the Board, according to staff. The Board Book is then made public on the Friday before a Board meeting. Senior staff will spend the weekend before the Board meeting talking through each Board member’s concerns and identifying their current thinking on application decisions. The Board meets to discuss and vote on staff recommendations the following Wednesday.

Board Meeting and Vote

Charter applicants can’t be denied except by a vote of the Board. However, applicants have withdrawn at various stages of the process and for various reasons. Some withdraw because the capacity interview highlights how deficient the application is. Others withdraw because DC PCSB staff sends them a letter informing them that they have found plagiarism or other deficiencies and noting that this is grounds for the Board to deny. Others withdraw at the last minute when they see the staff recommendation (as part of the public Board materials) and aren’t happy with the proposed conditions of opening. The DC PCSB holds public meetings and hearings every month. The Board posts agendas, minutes, and meeting materials for upcoming and previous meetings on their website. Interested individuals can sign up to receive monthly email updates on the DC PCSB and its schools. Applications

are decided with a majority vote. Board votes are usually unanimous.

Letter to Applicant

Denied applicants receive a letter from the Executive Director of the DC PCSB describing in detail the findings that were the basis for the denial and informing the applicant group of their options for appeal. If applicants want to appeal the denial of their application, they can seek judicial review in an appropriate court of the District of Columbia or a review by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education. Approved applicants receive a letter from the Executive Director informing them of the approval and outlining the conditions that the applicant group must satisfy to receive a charter from the Board. The lead founder must sign and agree to the conditions and a specified timeline to meet the conditions.

Access and Equity

The DC PCSB is explicit in their charter application that public schools must serve all students. Inclusiveness is one of the five Standards for Approval considered by the Board in evaluating every application. The Board expects every component of a school proposal to deliberately address how the school will be inclusive of all students. However, there are no specific diversity requirements or targets. Enrollment should reflect the community in which the school will be located. Diversity requirements also depend on the school proposal. For example, if a school aims to serve students in the foster care system, the applicant must describe related recruitment plans. The DC PCSB also has schools with missions focused on special education students. Enrollment and recruitment practices must reflect that mission.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Pre-opening Systems and Practices

The DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) thinks of their pre-opening process as a two-step process. The first step relates to any conditions that were included in the contract upon application approval. For example, if the DC PCSB feels that a charter board's capacity is high but has concerns about them not having a school leader, they will sometimes approve the charter's application with the condition that the school must have an experienced school leader in place by a certain date. Schools that do not meet these conditional requirements are not allowed to open.

Step two is specific to the school successfully completing the DC PCSB's Pre-opening Checklist. The Checklist consists of six categories of deliverables, and schools are required to provide evidence that they have met the Pre-opening Checklist requirements:

- **Governance and Management:** Includes deliverables related to the charter board's ability to operate. For example, the DC PCSB requires proof that the board has been established and thus asks for a board membership roster, bylaws, articles of incorporation, and the school's application for 501(c)(3) status from the IRS.
- **Staffing:** Includes deliverables related to readiness of the school's staff to be responsible for students. For example, the DC PCSB requires background check clearance documentation, as well as a roster of the teachers that will be employed at the school.
- **Curriculum and Instruction:** Includes deliverables related to curriculum and compliance with special education laws. For example, the DC PCSB requires documentation of the curriculum that has been selected, as well as documentation that the school is adequately prepared to find and serve students with disabilities.
- **Students and Parents:** Includes deliverables related to student discipline and the Student and Family Handbook. For example, the DC PCSB requires a copy of the Student and Family Handbook and proof that copies have been provided to parents, as well as evidence that procedures are in place for creating, storing, securing, and using student academic, attendance, and discipline records. The DC PCSB also

requires that school discipline policies meet federal requirements around due process and treatment of students with disabilities.

- **Operations:** Includes deliverables related to student safety, data compliance, and food safety. For example, the DC PCSB expects schools to provide evidence that they have a contract for food services, that there are systems in place to collect and submit compliance data, and that there are life-safety procedures in place.
- **Facilities, Furnishings, and Equipment:** Includes deliverables related to the space where students will attend classes. For example, the DC PCSB requires schools to provide a certificate of occupancy that shows the school is allowed to operate in that space and is not over capacity.

The DC PCSB is willing to work with schools on the Pre-Opening Checklist and wants to maintain some level of flexibility. For example, schools in DC are required to obtain a food vendor license similar to those that restaurants receive. This process can be lengthy and bureaucratic, so the DC PCSB works with schools on this process and does not penalize schools for noncompliance if they can prove they are working towards compliance.

Performance Framework

Data informing the DC PCSB's Performance Framework comes via two primary mechanisms: the Performance Management Framework (PMF) and Quality Site Reviews (QSR).

Performance Management Framework (PMF). The PMF is the primary tool by which the DC PCSB measures the academic performance of each charter school in Washington, DC. The PMF is used to evaluate each school in the DC PCSB's portfolio every year, including years when schools are not up for charter review or renewal. As such, it provides a regular update on each school's progress. The DC PCSB data team evaluates the PMFs and their targets annually. They consistently check for alignment with other data (e.g., are high-performing schools on the PMF conforming with other information

available on the school?) and benchmark their system against others across the country.

Although the specific measures that comprise the PMF vary for different school levels and school types, the same five domains of performance are used for all schools:

- **Student Progress:** the measure of growth over time as measured on the DC Comprehensive Assessment System (DCCAS)⁸ in reading and math
- **Student Achievement:** measures the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced (for high schools, performance on Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams are factored into the score)⁹
- **Gateway Indicators:** the evaluation of academic performance in specific subjects that predict future academic success and/or college and career readiness (e.g., college acceptance rate for high schools)
- **School Environment:** the evaluation of performance in specific predictors of future student progress and achievement (e.g., re-enrollment and attendance rates)
- **Mission-Specific Measures:** the evaluation of performance in criteria tailored specifically to each school to incorporate model and mission differences

The scores of each domain are added to find a school's overall score, which ranges from 0-100. Each measure has a weight, which is the maximum possible points that can be awarded for that measure, as well as an established floor and target. The floor determines the minimum value for which any points are awarded; thus, schools do not receive points for values that are at or below the floor. The target determines the value at which the maximum points for a common measure are awarded, so schools do not receive additional points for values that are above the target. A school's overall PMF score is calculated by taking the sum of the points earned by the school for all the measures for which it was eligible and dividing it by

the maximum possible score that could have been earned by the school. These overall scores are used to assign schools to performance tiers, which span high-performing (Tier 1), mid-performing (Tier 2), and low-performing (Tier 3) schools.

Washington, DC, is unique in that it has charter programs for early childhood and adult education. Because these schools do not offer a standardized statewide assessment, the DC PCSB has developed specialized PMFs for tracking the performance of these schools.

The DC PCSB has also taken steps to change the way it evaluates alternative charter schools, meaning charter schools with populations that are substantially different from the student population of DC as a whole. Because alternative schools have unique missions and student populations, the DC PCSB negotiates appropriate goals with each alternative charter school and assesses schools on their progress against these specific goals. The DC PCSB is charting new territory as it relates to their PMF for alternative schools. It was important to the DC PCSB to have a way to evaluate if the alternative schools within their portfolio positively impact student outcomes. Knowing their current PMFs could not adequately capture these effects, they worked with the schools and stakeholders across the country to create this new PMF.

Quality Site Reviews (QSRs). In addition to the PMF, the DC PCSB collects qualitative data via QSRs. These reviews consist of three major components:

- Meetings with school leadership
- Unannounced school visits
- Reviews of school board meetings and parent interactions

QSRs are composed of four components:

- An introductory meeting with school leaders to gather information about the school's mission, vision, and academic program
- Unannounced school visits
- Observation of a school's board meeting

⁸ Since 2015, DC has participated in the Partnership in Assessment Readiness Consortium (PARCC) assessments in English/Language Arts and Math

⁹ Beginning in 2018, DC PCSB plans to also include dual enrollment and CTE certifications.

- Observation of a school event(s) if it is pertinent to the school's goals

Every school in its first year of operation receives a “New School Review”—a less-intense version of the QSR. The findings of New School Reviews are not used or published. Instead, it is an opportunity for new school leaders to get a preview of what to expect later in the charter term.

From then on, every school receives a QSR in the year prior to its charter review, as well as in the year prior to its charter renewal. Schools in Tier 3 status or in state determined Focus/Priority status are also subject to QSRs each year.

Classroom observations are at the heart of the QSRs. All QSR team members must be trained on the classroom observation framework developed by Charlotte Danielson and pass a related 6-hour exam before being allowed to conduct observations. This builds trust among the schools that the process is objective.

In addition to the team lead, the QSR team includes other DC PCSB staff and consultants who are assigned to visit the school during the two-week window. The QSR team typically consists of two or more people, depending on the number of core-content teachers in the school. A consultant or staff member who is trained in observing special education instruction is assigned to visits for schools undergoing charter renewal or review. If the school has English Learners (ELs), a consultant or staff member who is trained in observing EL instruction will also be assigned to the QSR team.

Before any observations are made, the QSR team meets with the school leader. They discuss things such as mission and school structure. Various documents, such as a school schedule and a roster of teachers, are collected. The team works with the school leader to find a two-week window for DC PCSB staff to come, unannounced, to conduct the visits.

Each QSR visit typically takes between four to six hours to complete, and the team spends 30–40 minutes in each classroom they observe. While some classrooms may be observed more than once, the goal is for at least 75 percent of the school's core-content teachers to be observed. (In-school suspension classrooms may also be observed if a school has such a policy). During the

observations, staff and consultants gather qualitative evidence in two specific domains of the Danielson rubric: Classroom Environment and Instruction. They script what they see and wait to score the observations later in order to observe as many of each teacher's actions as possible in the time allowed.

Soon after the visiting period, the team prepares a written report. The team lead sets up a meeting with school leadership to go over the findings soon after the QSR visit. This meeting is usually conducted via conference call unless an in-person meeting is requested. The goal of the debrief is to share evidence-based findings with the school collected throughout the two-week observation period. The DC PCSB sends a completed report to the school's board chair and school leader eight to 10 weeks after the visit.

The report is used to inform charter renewals, charter reviews, and to provide the Board with complementary evidence to support a PMF score or a charter review. If a school disagrees with the results, the school must provide the following for the DC PCSB:

- Evidence/documentation of improvement efforts
- A written request to receive a follow-up visit. If the DC PCSB agrees to conduct a follow-up visit, the visit will occur during a one-month window and 50 percent of teachers will be randomly selected and observed.
- Schools must be undergoing the charter renewal/ review process, perform low on the QSR (a score less than 50 percent on the Framework for Teaching), and have a Tier 3 rating for at least two of the previous four years in order to receive a follow-up visit.

Performance Accountability

The DC PCSB monitors accountability compliance carefully and often. They regularly collect legal compliance, finance, attendance, discipline, academic, and enrollment data electronically. The DC PCSB also requires schools to validate various academic and nonacademic data throughout the year to ensure accurate reporting and to monitor school's outcomes. The DC PCSB deeply values transparency and aims to arm parents and families with as much information as they might need to make an informed decision about

their choice for their student's education. The DC PCSB also uses public data as a performance accountability measure of sorts—by making the data open, no school can obfuscate its performance. Additionally, it encourages healthy competition, helps dispel myths about charter schools, and can catalyze self-reflection for schools without the need for additional regulation.

Five- and Ten-Year Charter Reviews and Fifteen-Year Charter Renewals. The law requires that each public charter school be reviewed at least every five years to determine whether it has met the goals established for the school in its charter.¹⁰ At five and 10 years, the Board “may” revoke a charter; at the fifteen-year expiration of the charter, a school must be meeting its charter goals to earn a renewed charter. During these reviews, the DC PCSB staff engages in a detailed analysis of each goal of a school and determines whether a school has fully, substantially, partially, or not met the goal. It then produces a report for the Board that includes a recommendation of whether the school's charter should be revoked/non-renewed or continued/renewed. In borderline cases, a school's charter will be recommended for continuance under particularly strict conditions, such as the requirement to achieve a certain PMF score. If these conditions are not met in future years, the school's charter is then revoked.

Public Data as Performance

Accountability

Equity Reports. During the past four years, the DC PCSB has released annual Equity Reports for its portfolio of schools (District of Columbia Public Schools also creates similar Equity Reports for its schools, allowing the public to evaluate schools in the same way across the city). Equity Reports provide data on schools across six categories:

1. Attendance
2. Discipline
3. Graduation Rate
4. Student Achievement
5. Student Characteristics

¹⁰ The goals in the school's charter are the legal standard of review. The law does not mention the Performance Management Framework (PMF), as it was developed after the charter law was enacted. Most charter schools have elected to make achieving a certain minimum on the PMF as their charter goal, thus aligning these measurements. However, other schools have unique goals. As a general matter, schools with very low PMF scores are also not meeting their charter goals.

6. Student Movement

The Equity Reports provide unprecedented levels of information on how well each public and charter school in the District of Columbia serves all students. It provides families with apples-to-apples comparisons of schools and presents the results in an easy-to-understand format.

Public Reporting of Tiers. As mentioned previously, the DC PCSB uses the PMF to tier schools into three categories: high-performing (Tier 1), mid-performing (Tier 2), and low-performing (Tier 3). Similar to “report card grades”, the tiers signal to the public how well charter schools prepare students for college, improve their math and reading skills, and other metrics of school performance. Scott Pearson, the Executive Director of the DC PCSB, observed that the schools take pride in being labeled a Tier 1 school and that it has sparked healthy competition among the schools, citing several examples of Tier 1 schools proudly hanging banners outside their schools announcing their classification.

Mystery Shopper. The DC PCSB launched the Mystery Shopper Program in the 2012 school year as part of an initiative under their Open Enrollment Policy and DC Performance Plan. Due to its success, the DC PCSB has continued to use it every enrollment season since the pilot.

DC PCSB staff pose as parents or guardians who are seeking to enroll their child and call the charter schools in their portfolio. The caller asks questions about the enrollment process, including questions about enrolling a student with special needs. Schools that answer all of the questions appropriately, indicating open enrollment for all students, pass. If a school gives an inappropriate answer, indicating they are not an open enrollment school, a second call is made on another date to see if the first answer was an isolated incident or if there is systemic confusion/misbehavior. After two inappropriate responses, the school is contacted by the DC PCSB and provided an opportunity for re-training on open enrollment policies. Any school found to be in any way discouraging students from applying or limiting enrollment could be issued a Notice of Concern. Notices of Concern are taken into consideration

during each school's five- and 10-year charter review and during the charter renewal process.

Interventions

As noted, DC charter schools undergo a high-stakes review every five years and every 15 years for charter renewal. Short of revocation, it is unclear that the DC PCSB has the authority to issue consequences for schools that fail to make progress on conditions set before renewal. However, the DC PCSB feels that it is important to intervene and provide schools with incentives to improve short of revocation or threat of revocation within charters' 15-year terms. Therefore, they do follow an intervention process when issues are raised.

The DC PCSB uses professional judgment when determining when to intervene. The DC PCSB policy calls for issuing Notices of Concern or "Charter Warnings" for specified violations, such as inaccurate or non-timely data submissions, particularly low attendance, or failure to pass the Mystery Shopper process. But the list is not exhaustive, and there isn't an official comprehensive list of triggers or rubric for judging the threshold for issuing a Notice of Concern, Charter Warning, or revocation.

In addition, the Board will intervene in a non-public way if it is concerned with poor school performance. Potential triggers include a low PMF, problematic things observed during a QSR, or very high discipline rates. One DC PCSB staffer said, "Typically, one low PMF indicator is not a trigger. Usually if we see a combination of worrisome conditions...we'll step in." These interventions can include reaching out to school leadership, Board-to-board meetings, formal audits of the school, or school visits, all further described below. Staff also mentioned that it is helpful to have a diverse group of thinkers on the team, because it helped them have healthy discussions and arrive at smart professional judgments when making determinations about interventions.

For low-performing schools (Tier 3 and lower Tier 2), these interventions are important to help schools "right the course" before the Board pursues closure.

Board-to-Board Meetings. The DC PCSB has open and honest conversations with the school boards of Tier 3 schools around the likelihood of the school improving. In many cases, these conversations happen prior to the school reaching Tier 3 status (as with Tier 2 schools that

are on a downward trajectory), so that school boards recognize the critical need for fundamental turnaround. These meetings, which are followed up in writing, typically involve two members of the DC PCSB Board and the board leadership of the school in question. DC PCSB Board members highlight the school's low performance and focus the school board's attention on the need to improve the school and the consequences, which could ultimately lead to school closure. The DC PCSB generally does not demand performance improvement plans. The steps the school takes to improve the school are for the school board and leadership to decide.

Critical Complaint Urgent Response Team (CCURT).

The DC PCSB has a structured process for visiting schools about which it is concerned called the Critical Compliant Urgent Response Team, or CCURT. Concerns may arise for a variety of reasons, including community complaints, poor site visits, or low non-academic data. Staff conduct an unscheduled visit and determine whether a follow-up visit or a series of visits is needed. If there are no further concerns, the process ends after the initial visit. If concerns persist, senior staff may visit the school to determine next steps, which may include a visit to the school by DC PCSB leadership or Board members, a Board-to-board meeting, a Notice of Concern, or a high-stakes review. These CCURT visits may happen well before the school falls into Tier 3 status, giving both the DC PCSB and the school more information to support improvement.

Performance Management Framework and Qualitative Site Reviews.

The DC PCSB uses the Performance Management Framework along with its Qualitative Site Reviews to identify areas of growth for schools. Tier 3 schools receive a comprehensive Qualitative Site Review (QSR), enabling the DC PCSB to identify key areas of growth. Using Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching rubric for classroom observations, DC PCSB staff and consultants evaluate the quality of two domains; Classroom Environment and Instruction. DC PCSB staff along with consultants trained extensively in the use of the rubric observe schools' instructional staff and rate teachers on a scale of "below basic" to "distinguished" in each of the eight elements within the two domains. In addition to classroom observations, the QSR also includes observations of the school's mission, goals, and a board meeting. After the QSR, the DC PCSB team lead gathers data from all review participants and produces a report

which details the areas of strength and the areas of growth for a school. After the team completes the review, the DC PCSB lead also has a conversation with school leadership to provide feedback around these areas of strength and growth.

Probation Agreements/Turnaround Plans. Recognizing the need for drastic turnaround if a Tier 3 school is to remain open, some schools choose to enter into Turnaround Plans prior to their formal charter review by the DC PCSB or as a condition of continuance during a high-stakes review.¹¹ Probation Agreements/Turnaround Plans set out clear deliverables and outcomes for schools and real consequences if the school does not meet these deliverables. These Agreements may indicate the possibility of charter revocation if the school fails to meet the benchmarks set forth in the Agreement.

Extension, Renewal, and Revocation

Charter Review. A charter review is an assessment required by law of a school's academic performance, legal compliance, and fiscal management. The DC PCSB is required to review each school at least once every five years and generally conducts charter reviews during each school's fifth and tenth year in operation.

DC PCSB staff first analyze the school's performance and draft a preliminary review analysis for the DC PCSB Board's consideration. This analysis includes an assessment of the school's academic performance, goal attainment, legal compliance, fiscal management, and recommendations to the DC PCSB Board regarding the outcome of the charter review.

The DC PCSB then gives the school 10 days to respond to the preliminary review analysis to correct any factual errors. After the school has reviewed the report and submitted corrections or responses, the DC PCSB can revise the report and share the finalized review analysis with the school again. DC PCSB staff share the review analysis with the DC PCSB Board as they prepare to vote on the charter review.

There are three outcomes of a charter review:

1. Full charter continuance
2. Charter continuance, with conditions
3. Charter revocation

If in its fiscal analysis of the school, the DC PCSB determines that the school (a) has engaged in a pattern of non-adherence to generally accepted accounting principles; (b) has engaged in a pattern of fiscal mismanagement; and/or (c) is not economically viable, then it is required to revoke the school's charter. For all other findings, the DC PCSB has more discretion.

For example, the DC PCSB can revoke a school's charter if it finds that a school has:

1. Not met its goals
2. Not met its academic expectations
3. Materially non-complied with its charter
4. Materially violated applicable law

Charter Renewal. Every DC charter school receives a charter agreement with a term of 15 years. If a school wants to continue operating beyond these 15 years, it is required by law to submit an application to the DC Public Charter School Board to renew its charter for another 15-year term. In turn, the DC PCSB is required to not renew a school's charter if it finds that the school:

- Has committed a material violation of applicable laws (including special education laws) or the terms, conditions, standards, or procedures of its charter
- Failed to meet its goals and student academic achievement expectations
- Did not adhere to generally accepted accounting principles
- Engaged in a pattern of fiscal mismanagement
- Is not economically viable

The steps of the renewal process include:

- **Pre-renewal meeting:** The DC PCSB meets with each school to discuss the school's renewal, including the school's goals and student academic achievement expectations.
- **Qualitative site review:** A year before renewal, the DC PCSB conducts a QSR review at each campus of a school applying for renewal to gather qualitative evidence about the extent to which a school is meeting its mission, goals, and student academic achievement expectations. Staff then issues a QSR report specific to each campus to

document its qualitative findings, which is then incorporated into the renewal report.

- **Renewal application:** Charter law allows schools to submit their charter application between a year and 120 days before the expiration of their charter. The DC PCSB encourages schools to turn their applications in by October of the year in which they are applying.
- **Right to a renewal hearing:** The law allows schools applying for charter renewal an opportunity for an informal, public renewal hearing before the DC PCSB Board. The DC PCSB must inform the school of its right to an informal hearing no later than 15 days after the school submits its renewal application, and schools must elect whether to request such a hearing within 15 days of receiving the notice. The DC PCSB provides schools with a draft of its renewal report along with this notice within 15 days of receipt of the school's application to renew.
- **Preliminary renewal report:** The DC PCSB's preliminary charter renewal analysis includes a staff assessment of the school's academic performance, legal compliance, and fiscal management, as well as a recommendation to the DC PCSB Board regarding whether it should renew the school's charter. The DC PCSB shares its preliminary analysis with the school to allow the school an opportunity to respond to the report in writing, to correct any factual errors, and to determine whether or not they would like to request a public hearing.
- **Renewal hearing (if requested):** By request, the DC PCSB Board will conduct an informal hearing at the school, if possible.
- **Vote on renewal:** If the school does not request a hearing, the DC PCSB Board votes on renewal no later than 30 days after the date the DC PCSB informed the school of its right to a hearing. If the school does request a hearing, the DC PCSB Board votes on renewal no later than 30 days after the date of the hearing. If possible, the DC PCSB Board conducts the vote on whether to renew during regularly scheduled DC PCSB public meetings, but it is not a requirement.

The DC PCSB Board may then vote to:

- Renew the school's charter for another 15-year term
- Renew the school's charter but (in the event that the performance of one or more of a school's campuses is negatively affecting the performance of the Local Education Agency) under the condition that one or more of the school's campuses that do not meet the standard for renewal be closed
- Not renew the school's charter

Replication and Growth

The DC PCSB does not have an automatic replication policy. Instead, schools and networks interested in growing must submit an application (the DC PCSB has one application, but it is differentiated for new vs. experienced operators) or contract amendment. When making decisions about which schools should be allowed to expand or replicate, the DC PCSB data team looks carefully at the school's academic and QSR data. DC PCSB staff mentioned they have noticed a relationship between fast growth and dips in academic performance, and so they encourage schools to be very thoughtful before making the decision to grow.